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ABSTRACT

An experimentl was designed to replicate and confirm previous research findings which suggest that the way persons communicate is related to their perceptions of communication behavior. The experiment was successful. Subjects with low Communicator Style Measure (CSM) scores do not report perceiving a significant difference. Three raters evaluated the video taped interactions and confirm that a significant difference exists between the way in which low and high CSM scorers communicate. Two potential explanations are posited and discussed: social desirability and perceptual deficiency. Lastly, the rudimentary elements of a theory of communicator style are reviewed and recommendations for research offered. (Author/RB)

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DYADIC PERCEPTION OF COMMUNICATOR STYLE: REPLICATION, CONFIRMATION, AND THEORY

Introduction

Human beings are inherently social animals whose ability to successfully adjust to and partake in the social world depends in no small measure on a reasonably accurate assessment of both self and other(s). Concern with accuracy of social perception in the interpersonal context has been evidenced by numerous investigators, for example, Newcomb (1953, 1961); Steiner (1955); Laing, Phillipson, and Lee (1966); Chaffee and McLeod (1968); Schaff (1967); Tagiuri (1969); Tajfel (1969); and Stamm and Pearce (1971). The nexus of this concern is this: the ability to make accurate judgments with respect to social interaction bears a marked impact on the quality and effectiveness of human relations. Allport (1961) maintains that a number of personal characteristics, e.g., intelligence, previous experience, and social skill very likely influence, if not control, the degree to which we are accurate in our judgments of others. This study presumes that one's intelligence, previous experience, and entire social complex or personality are to a considerable extent manifest in one's "communicator style," i.e., the way in which one communicates.

The concept "communicator style" is consistent with Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson's (1967) tripart analysis of the dimensions of human communication.[1] Pragmatics, their third component and the one of interest here, represents a concern with social behavior, that is, "sender-receiver relations, as mediated by communication" (p. 22). Watzlawick et al. maintain that the influence of "posture, gesture, facial expression, voice inflection, the sequence, rhythm," and other communication cues and tendencies of which humans are capable tend to define relationships between people (p. 62). If so, the accuracy or extent to which these communication tendencies and behaviors are perceived by interactants ought to substantively influence

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the establishment of satisfying and/or effective relationships. Indeed, Feffer and Suchotliff (1966) define effective social interactants as those who are aware of how they communicate and how they are perceived by others.

Very few studies have examined the relationship between communicator style and social perception. What literature is relevant has been reviewed elsewhere (Norton and Miller, 1975; and Miller, 1975) and will not be reiterated here.

The term "communicator style" refers to the way a person communicates apart from the manifest content of a communication. A person's communicator style consists of a variety of individually characteristic and correlated communication behaviors and predispositions. In the earlier study (Norton and Miller, 1975) variations in perception of communicator style by persons with differing Communicator Style Measure (CSM) scores were assessed:

> Twenty-four dyads participated in an interpersonal encounter. Postinteraction data analysis indicated that subjects with low CSM scores do not report perceiving any appreciable difference between their communicator style and that of subjects with high CSM scores. In contrast, subjects with high CSM scores report perceiving a significant difference.

Two explanations were offered for these findings. Either: (1) low CSM scorers are perceptually deficient and did not see the difference or (2) low CSM scorers did see the difference, but chose not to acknowledge it (social desirability).

This study employs a revised CSM and a more rigorous design to replicate previous findings. In addition, three Communicator Style Raters viewed video tapes of the interactions and rated the communicator styles of the participants. Data analysis confirms that low CSM scorers are low, moderate CSM scorers moderate, and high CSM scorers are high with respect to communication dynamics.

Communicator Style Measure

The twenty-five item paper-and-pencil measure of communicator style devised by Norton and Miller (1975) consists of three clusters: dominance, frequency of speech, and momentum. McQuitty's Elementary Linkage Analysis (1957, 1968, 1971) was used to identify the clusters, rather than factor analysis, because the items are structurally interdependent. In an effort to refine the instrument and check for potential dimensionality, an expanded CSM consisting of fifty-one items was administered to two hundred and eighty-three undergraduate speech communication students at the University of Michigan. A seven point response scale was employed. The data was subjected to Johnson's (1967) hierarchial clustering scheme. Basically, high cluster analysis is a technique for partitioning variables into optimally homogeneous groups on the basis of some empirical measure of similarity. In this analysis, product-moment correlation coefficients were employed. Dominance emerged as the most potent dimension of communicator style[2] and consists of the following items:

(1) I try to take charge of things when I am with people.

(2) I have a tendency to dominate informal conversations with other people.

(3) In most social situations I tend to come on strong.

(4) I would describe myself as dominant in social situations.

(5) In most social situations I generally speak quite frequently.

(6) In most social situations I tend to speak for long periods of time.

(7) When I am in a group the conversation tends to revolve around me.

(8) In most social situations I tend to direct the course of conversation.

In order to further refine the dominance items (while investigating other potentially discrete components of communicator style), a second revision of the CSM was undertaken. In this fifty-one item revision some items were replaced while others were modified. Data from three hundred and eighty-three cases were subjected to factor analysis (varimax rotation). The seven emergent factors account for 42.82% of the variance in the respondents' answers. Factor I, dominance, again emerged as the most potent dimension. This factor alone accounts for over 17% of the explained variance.[3]

Nunnally (1967) argues that it is necessary to combine scores on a number of variables to obtain valid measures of constructs. The factor analysis indicates which variables ought to be grouped together to validly measure communicator style. The variables comprising dominance and employed in this study are:

(1) In most social situations I generally speak very frequently.

(2) In most social situations I tend to come on strong.

(3) I have a tendency to dominate informal conversations with other people.

(4) I try to take charge of things when I am with people.

(5) I am dominant in social situations.

Research Design

The independent variable in this experiment, communicator style was determined by stratifying a sample of people who voluntarily completed the fifty-one item CSM. A four point response scale was employed for

each item. Although factor analysis identified seven factors, only the dominance dimension was used to stratify the sample because: (1) dominance is the most potent dimension of communicator style and ties most completely with the measure employed by Norton and Miller (1975), and (2) the behavior of the other dimensions has not yet been explored.

One thousand and eighty-five undergraduate speech communication students at the University of Michigan, Western Michigan University, and the Detroit Business College completed the questionnaire. The dominance dimension was normally distributed with a mean of 2.41 and a standard deviation of .57. Any person scoring within one-half standard deviation of the mean was defined as "middle." Subjects classified as middle reported scores of/or between 2.13 and 2.69. Any subject reporting a score in the second positive standard deviation was classified as "high." Any subject reporting a score in the second negative standard deviation was classified as "low." A one-half standard deviation partition between middle and high and middle and low scorers was arbitrarily drawn to decrease the liklihood that subjects with very similar scores might be misclassified and subsequently paired for interaction. Similarly, those scoring in the extreme tails, the third positive and negative standard deviations, were excluded from consideration, but for a different reason. While the number of subjects in the third standard deviations was small, there is some evidence (Hayes & Meltzer, 1972; and Bushard, 1959) suggesting that extremely talkative (dominant) and extremely quiet (non-dominant) individuals characteristically stimulate very negative affective responses in others. Consequently, in the interest of keeping the data as affectively uncontaminated as possible, the outlyers were excluded.

Only subjects attending the University of Michigan and voluntarily signing their names to the CSM pretest were included in the experimental

subject pool. Of the four hundred and ninety-one volunteers, three hundred and twenty-seven constitute the actual sample. The balance of the subjects scored too high, too low, or fell into that portion of the postive and negative standard deviation arbitrarily excluded from the experiment. As in the study by Nort and Miller, potential sex effects were controlled by employing equal numbers of sex-same and sex-mixed dyads. Twenty-four dyads were constructed. In twelve dyads, high CSM pretest scorers interacted with low CSM pretest scorers. In twelve other dyads middle pretest scorers met other middle scorers.

The dependent variable, the same five items initially employed to classify communicator style, was administered after the subjects mutually completed a task requiring social interaction. The post interaction CSM provided information concerning: (1) how the subjects viewed themselves in the interpersonal encounter, and (2) how the subjects viewed the other person in the same encounter. As in the previous study, the CSM pretest and post-test were used to pinpoint apparent discrepancies, if any, in the perceptions of each subject.

Norton and Miller point to the need for more objective data if a decision is to be made between the two alternative explanations for the failure of low CSM pretest scorers to report a difference between their communicator style and that of high pretest scorers. Somewhat objective data was provided by three Communicator Style Raters. The CSM was administered to twenty-eight graduate students in the Department of Speech Communication at the University of Michigan. Their scores were normally distributed. Three raters, two female and one male, each possessing middle range scores were selected to view video

tape replays of the dyadic interactions and subsequently rate the communicator styles of the interactants. Persons with middle range scores were selected because: (1) the previous study suggests that those scoring in the middle range accurately perceive the characteristics of dyadic interaction and (2) middle range scorers comprise the largest and therefore most representative classification of communicator style.

Procedure

A ten- to twelve-week period passed between the pretest and the dyadic encounters. The stimulus in the prior study, A Case Study of American Values, had asked subjects to determine five objects which best symbolize current American values. This stimulus was again employed for two reasons: (1) it has been successful in producing lively discussions and (2) the exercise is not focused by the experimenter on any particular topic or issue. By decreasing the tendency to link communicator style to externally generated topics and issues, e.g., abortion, politics, education, etc., the opportunity for subject control over interaction content is increased. Such control is presumed to be desirable since it obviates, to some extent, the possibility of an externally induced or activated mental set influencing the way a person communicates and the interactants' subsequent assessments of one another. In short, the American values stimulus maximizes opportunity for subject matter spontaneity and self direction, while minimizing potential experimenter influence on the interaction.

Subjects were given five minutes to independently complete the task. Thus, each participant had time to understand the task and commit him/herself to some solution. The participants were introduced to one another

and given ten minutes to interact and mutually complete the same task. Interaction during the ten-minute period was video taped through a one-way mirror (Kagan & Krathwohl, 1967) with full knowledge of the interactants. Upon time expiration, subjects were asked to respond to two five item post interaction measures.[4]

The taped sessions were subsequently shown to the raters. Encounters were randomly presented at the raters' convenience over a two-week period. No more than four tapes were viewed at any one rating session. Thus, the raters evaluated the interactions under conditions designed to promote minimal fatigue and monotony. Each rater assessed the interactants' communicator style on parallel versions of the CSM post-test employed by the participants themselves.[5] Every two and one-half minutes the tape was stopped and the interactants' communicator styles were rated. Thus, each subject on each tape was evaluated four times by each rater. This procedure was employed in an effort to permit the raters to be sensitive to the dynamic flow of the interaction.

Hypotheses

The study by Norton and Miller (1975) generated three research hypotheses.[6] Following a mutual interpersonal encounter:

(A) Subjects who score "middle" on the CSM pretest will accurately perceive the communicator style of others who score middle on the CSM pretest.

(B) Subjects who score "high" on the CSM pretest will accurately perceive the communicator style of those who score low on the CSM pretest.

(C) Subjects who score "low" on the CSM pretest will not accurately perceive the communicator style of those who score high on the CSM pretest.

Replication

The self report data was analyzed through the use of UCLA's Biomedical Computer Program BMD8V. The design called for a four-way analysis of variance with an alpha level of .05. Table 1 displays the post-test means and standard errors on the five item CSM ratings of self and other by communicator style pretest classification. Table 2 displays the results

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Table 1 about here

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of the analysis of variance. The four main ANOVA indices are designated

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Table 2 about here

I, J, K, and L. I represents communicator style conditions and consists of two levels. In level one, high pretest scorers interacted with low pretest scorers. In level two, middle pretest scorers met others who scored in the middle range. Post-test ratings for the I conditions were not significant. J and K respectively represent the sex of the first and second person in each dyad. There was no significant sex related effect in the data. L represents ratings and consists of four levels: the first person's rating of self and other and the second person's rating of self and other. This effect was significant ($F_{(3,48)} = 9.02$, $p < .005$) and accounts for 24.1% of the variance in the data set. Table 3 presents

TABLE 1

FIVE-ITEM CSM POST-TEST MEANS AND STANDARD ERRORS FOR RATINGS OF SELF AND OTHER BY COMMUNICATOR STYLE PRETEST CLASSIFICATION

Group	High CSM Pretest*		Middle CSM Pretest**		Low CSM Pretest*	
	$\bar{X}$	SE	$\bar{X}$	SE	$\bar{X}$	SE
Self-rating-self:	14.0	.64	12.1	.37	11.7	.72
Self-rating-other:	11.2	.66	10.8	.24	11.4	.85

*N=12

**N=24

TABLE 2

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: FIVE-ITEM CSM POST-TEST

Source*	Sum of Squares	df	% Contributed to Total Sum of Squares	F
I	8.76	1	.017	2.65
J	.51	1	.001	.15
K	12.76	1	.025	3.86
L	120.19	3	.241	9.02**
IJ	.09	1	.000	.02
IK	4.59	1	.009	1.39
JK	4.59	1	.009	1.39
IL	1.19	3	.002	.08
JL	15.61	3	.031	1.17
KL	11.86	3	.023	.88
IJK	.51	1	.001	.15
IJL	22.86	3	.045	1.71
IKL	20.53	3	.041	1.54
JKL	4.36	3	.008	.32
R(IJK)	52.83	16	.106	
IJKL	1.94	3	.003	.14
LR(IJK)	213.16	48	.428	

*I = Levels of communicator style: high vs. low or middle vs. middle
J = Sex of first person in dyad: male or female
K = Sex of second person in dyad: male or female
L = Ratings: J's rating of self, J's rating of other, K's rating of self, K's rating of other
R = Replications (N=3)

**p <.005

simple pair-wise mean comparisons for the four levels of L (Marascuilo, 1971, pp. 356-60). Each comparison involving the first persons' self

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Table 3 about here

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rating made a significant contribution to the effect. Importantly, high pretest scorers held first person positions. The contrasts indicate that a significant difference exists between the first persons' ratings of self and the first persons' ratings of the other. In twelve of the twenty-four dyads the other was a low pretest scorer. Persons holding the initial position in the dyads also report a significant difference between their communicator styles and those reported by persons holding the second position. Additionally, first persons report a significant difference between their own self ratings and the ratings they received from those holding second person positions.

By collapsing the middle scores for self and other and then graphing the L means, the effect becomes both more stable and clear. Figure 1 displays the mean scores for the CSM post-test and for self-rating-self and self-rating-other with the middle scores collapsed. The figure

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Figure 1 about here

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indicates that high pretest scorers report a significant difference between the way they communicate and the way low pretest scorers communicate. Low pretest scorers did not report a significant difference, in fact, the low scorers rated themselves slightly higher than they rated

TABLE 3

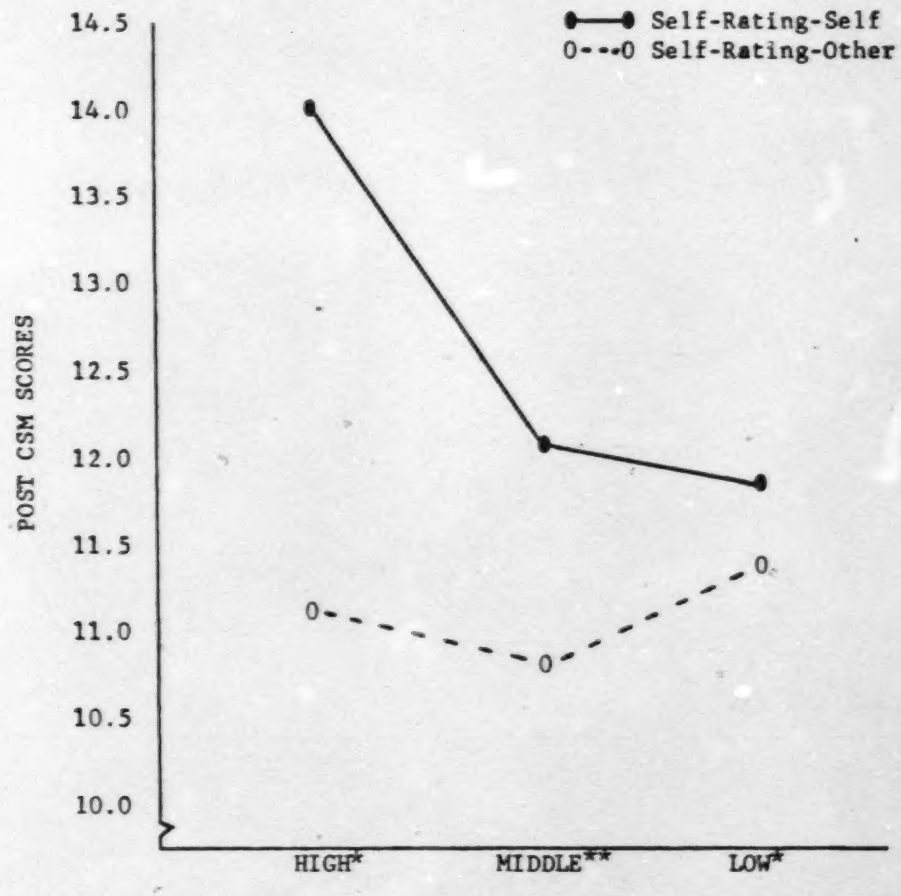
SIMPLE PAIR-WISE MEAN COMPARISONS FOR L EFFECT IN THE FIVE-ITEM POST-TEST MEASURE

Comparison*	Value of ψ	SE^2_{ψ}	Lower Limit	Upper Limit	Decision
$\psi_1 = \mu_1 - \mu_2$	2.66	.37	.89	4.43	significant
$\psi_2 = \mu_1 - \mu_3$	2.37	.37	.60	4.14	significant
$\psi_3 = \mu_1 - \mu_4$	2.66	.37	.89	4.43	significant
$\psi_4 = \mu_2 - \mu_3$	-0.29	.37	-2.06	1.48	non-significant
$\psi_5 = \mu_2 - \mu_4$	0	.37	-1.77	1.77	non-significant
$\psi_6 = \mu_3 - \mu_4$	0.29	.37	-1.48	2.06	non-significant

*Levels of L:
1 First person self-rating-self cell mean = 13.70
2 First person self-rating-other cell mean = 11.04
3 Second person self-rating-self cell mean = 11.33
4 Second person self-rating-other cell mean = 11.04

FIGURE 1

MEAN SCORES ON FIVE-ITEM CSM POST-TEST FOR THE SELF-RATING-SELF AND THE SELF-RATING-OTHER



*N = 12
**N = 24

the other. Middle scorers, overall, saw themselves and the other, who was also middle, as scoring in the middle range. In short, this experiment serves to support the hypotheses and replicate the findings reported by Norton and Miller (1975).

Confirmation

Three raters observed the video tapes and rated the communicator styles of the interactants. Prior to rating the experimental tapes, the raters viewed and evaluated two sample tapes. These tapes were assessed in order to familiarize the raters with the CSM and to generate data for computing an inter-rater reliability coefficient. The coefficient of reliability, i.e., the ratio of coding agreements to the total number of coding decisions (Holsti, 1969) was .965.[7] In short, after observing the sample tapes, the raters responded to the items on the CSM both consistently and similarly.

The raters, as previously noted, rated each subject four times. Since the ratings for each time period are not independent, the four scores were averaged. By averaging the scores, the dynamic nature of human communication was accomodated and each subject afforded a stable rating. Each subject's score was then averaged across raters, thereby additionally enhancing the stability of the score. The high coefficient of reliability argues for the permissability of this procedure. The derived data, i.e., a single score representing each subject's communicator style across four time periods and three raters was subsequently analyzed. The BMD8V program employing four ANOVA indices, I, J, K, and L, was again utilized. The alpha level was set at .05.

One main effect and one two-way interaction attained statistical significance. The main effects I, communicator style conditions, J, sex of the first person, and K, sex of the second person, were not significant. The L effect, raters' evaluations of the communicator styles of the interactants, however, was significant ($F_{(1,16)} = 11.06$, $p < .005$) and accounts for 16.8% of the variance in the data set. The two-way interaction between I and L was also significant ($F_{(1,16)} = 4.63$, $p < .05$).

Figure 2 presents the L effect by I conditions. The graph displays

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Figure 2 about here

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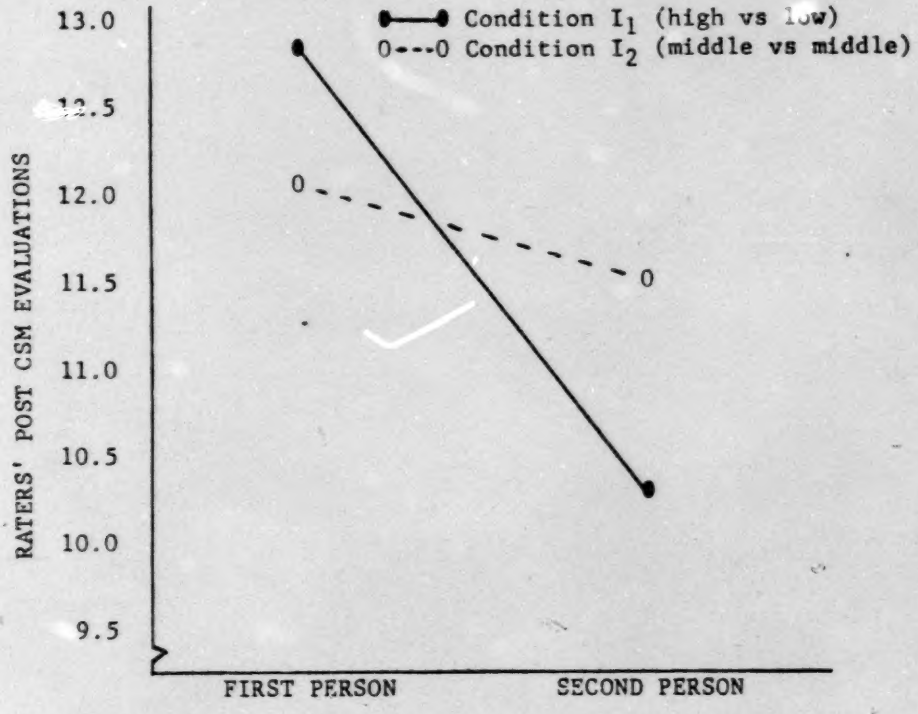
the difference between the two I conditions and the difference between the first and second persons as perceived by the raters. Those subjects in condition I_1 classified themselves on the pretest as generally possessing either high or low communicator style scores. After viewing video tapes of high and low pretest scorers interacting, the observers rated those who scored high on the pretest as being high scorers during the encounter. Those who scored low on the pretest were perceived as low scorers during the encounter. Subjects who scored in the middle range on the pretest, condition I_2, were seen as scoring in the middle range. In short, three raters possessing middle range pretest scores perceived high pretest scorers as high, middle pretest scorers as middle, and low pretest scorers as low.[8]

A profile analysis (Morrison, 1967) compared the three communicator style classifications. Figure 3 displays the profiles of the high,

FIGURE 2

EFFECT L MEAN SCORES ON THE RATERS' FOUR-ITEM CSM POST-TEST ACROSS BOTH I CONDITIONS



Condition I_1
L = 1 Mean Rating of First Person = 12.7
2 Mean Rating of Second Person = 10.3
Condition I_2
L = 1 Mean Rating of First Person = 12.1
2 Mean Rating of Second Person = 11.5

middle, and low scoring subjects across the four time intervals.

Figure 3 about here

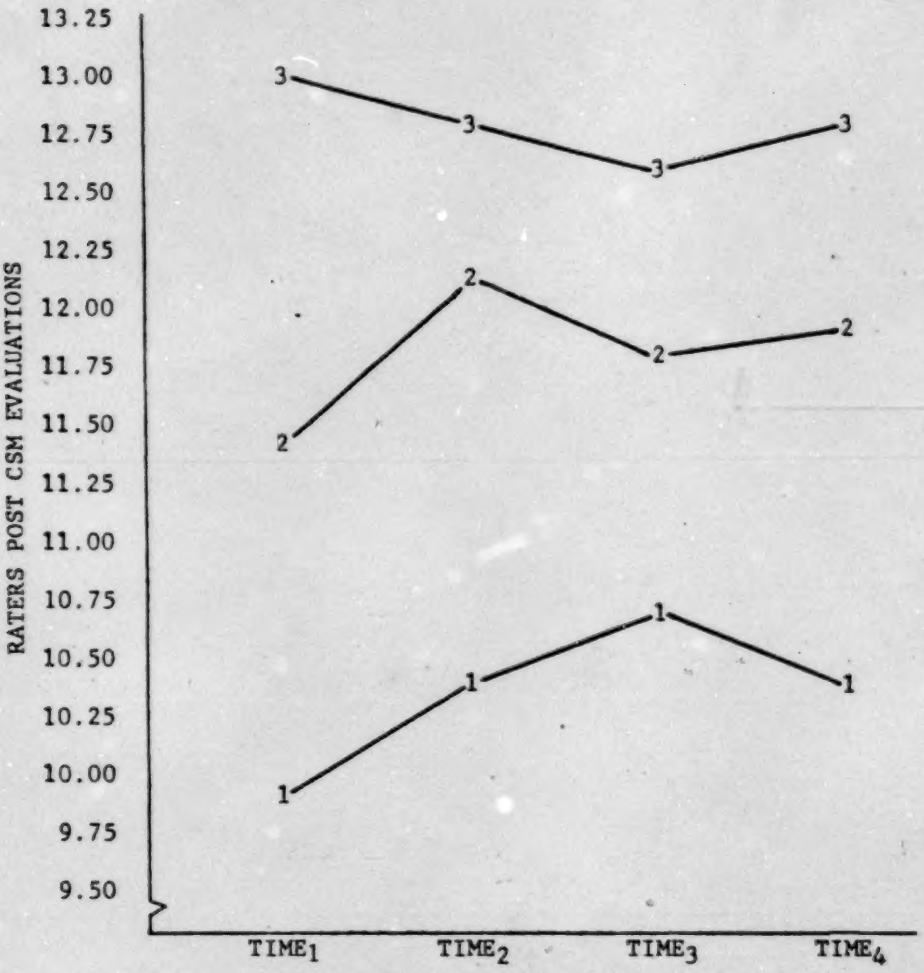
Analysis indicates that the profiles are parallel. Additionally, the strata are significantly different from one another ($F_{(2,141)} = 12.90$, $p < .0005$). Visual inspection of the figure suggests that the high and low scoring groups regressed toward the middle over the first three time periods. During the last two and one-half minutes, however, both groups began to move away from the middle and one another in terms of the way they communicated. It is impossible to know from this experiment just what the ultimate impact of extended exposure and conversation between high and low scoring subjects may be. Whether similarity continues until the communicator styles are indistinguishable or whether the movement toward one another is a temporary phenomenon is a question well suited for future research.

Discussion

Two possible explanations for the failure of low pretest scorers to report a difference between the way they and high pretest scorers communicate are possible: (1) social desirability or (2) perceptual deficiency. The first explanation suggests that low scorers may be fully aware of differences in communicator style, but choose not to acknowledge them. They may be systematically inflating their own scores while deflating those awarded to the other. This explanation is somewhat viable and appealing. Tagiuri (1969, p. 422) notes that "in all complex cognitive processes, there is a tendency to maximize balance and to avoid dissonance of elements." Social perception is a complex cognitive process; thus, the low scoring subjects may have experienced dissonance at their own

FIGURE 3

PROFILE OF RATERS EVALUATIONS OF THE HIGH, MIDDLE, AND LOW CSM PRETEST SCORERS OVER FOUR TIME INTERVALS



Strata 1 = Low CSM Pretest Scorers
Strata 2 = Middle CSM Pretest Scorers
Strata 3 = High CSM Pretest Scorers

comparatively unimpressive performance and consequently opted to report maximum balance, i.e., no difference between themselves and the high CSM scoring others. Unfortunately, this would not explain why the high scorers reported substantial differences. The very fact, however, that high scorers did not report as the low scorers did lends additional weight to social desirability as a possible explanation. In as much as rich and replete communication competencies are highly desirable social skills, it makes intuitive sense to argue that it is quite adaptative for subjects low in dominance not to report perceiving subjects high in dominance as dominant. While it is not possible to unequovically determine from the present data set whether or not social desirability is the "true" explanation for why low pretest scorers fail to report a difference, it is a conceivable and a somewhat appealing explanation.

The second explanation argues that low scorers are perceptually deficient with respect to the dynamics of communicator styles, i.e., they fail to recognize the relevant class of communication cues that do exist during interpersonal encounters. Steiner and Berelson (1964, p. 87) maintain two basic starting points with regard to perceptual phenomenon: "(1) all knowledge of the world depends on the senses and their stimulation, but (2) the facts of raw sensory data are insufficient to produce or to explain the coherent picture of the world as experienced by the normal adult." None of the subjects in this experiment were physiologically impaired, i.e., none were blind or deaf. Similarily, the nature of the communication cues provided during the encounters is not in question. The motivation for having raters view video tapes of the interactions and rate the communicator styles of the interactants was to help determine just what sense stimuli were available. The raters' data clearly indicates that there were sufficient communication

cues and differences across subjects to distinguish patterns of communication and subsequently classify the subjects with respect to observed communication behavior. This somewhat objective data is consistent with the self reports of the high and middle range CSM pretest scorers across two separate studies (Norton & Miller, 1975; and the present one). Only the self report data of low pretest scorers is consistently inconsistent.

The social desirability explanation wains somewhat when one considers that subjects were initially classified upon the basis of their own assessment of their communicator style. If social desirability is the mechanism at work, why should subjects initially admit that they are somewhat deficient or minimally possessed of communication skills they recognize as socially desirable? One might contend, of course, that reactive effects induced by the experimental encounter provides a plausible explanation for this apparent inconsistency. Yet, there is little obvious reason to doubt the veracity of the subjects in reporting what they observed. A brief interview conducted at the conclusion of each encounter indicated that none of the subjects experienced any difficulty in completing the post-test measure. Additionally, very few reported or appeared being effected by the knowledge that they were being video taped.

While it is impossible to determine exactly what went on in the minds of the low pretest scoring subjects (or any subjects for that matter), consideration of the low scorers pretest data, as well as that provided by the other subjects and the raters serves to bolster perceptual deficiency as the most viable explanation. Tagiuri (1969, p. 396) maintains: "in person perception the similarity between the perceiver and the perceived object is greater than in any other case. This unique fact probably inclines and enables the perceiver to make full use of his own experience in perceiving, judging, or inferring another's state or intention." Further, "individuals

differ consistently in the traits they use and in the weights they give to traits in their perceptions and thoughts about others" (p. 430). And lastly, "the work of Goffman (1959) on the presentation of self is useful in exploring the problem of how we convey, and hence how we presumably understand, various emotions and qualities" (p. 433, emphasis partially added). The subjects classified as "low scorers" were so classified as a result of self report data. In comparison with others (middle range and high scorers) these subjects reportedly possess less extensive and dynamic social communication skills. The post interaction data provided by the high scoring pretest subjects and the moderately scoring raters tends to confirm the low pretest scoring subjects' initial report. If we accept and apply Tagiuri's analysis, low CSM scorers are inclined to consistently use their own experience and communication skills to help understand and interpret the communication skills and traits of others. The implication is that because they are confronted with skills they have not learned and do not themselves possess, they fail to recognize differences that do exist. Tajfel (1969, p. 321) maintains that "efficiency of recall is closely related to the focusing on the relevant class of cues at the time of perceiving them." The post interaction data for low pretest scoring subjects suggests that they do not recall perceiving a difference between their communicator style and that of high scoring others. High scorers do report seeing a difference and so do raters after viewing video tape replays of the interactions. The most parsimonious interpretation of the data maintains simply that low scorers fail to focus on the relevant class of communication cues. The social desirability explanation is plausible, but not parsimonious because it necessitates that low scorers: (1) saw communication differences, (2) executed some value laden mental gymnastics, and (3) intentionally refused

to report what they actually observed.

Overall, the data reported here are interpreted as suggesting that there is a functional relationship between communicator style and perceptual accuracy of communication dynamics. Following a mutual interpersonal encounter, people who score low on the dominance dimension of the CSM fail to accurately perceive the communication characteristics of their more dominant counterparts. Those who report high or middle range pretest scores accurately perceive their counterparts.

Rudiments of a Theory of Communicator Style

Two presuppositions, both with some empirical base, underlie this research. First, the set of human communication behaviors characterizing the way a person communicates correlate to the extent that they may be thought of as a construct which has been labeled communicator style. Second, different styles of communication characterize different abilities to perceive communication dynamics (see Norton & Miller, 1975, for a review of supporting literature).

Essentially this research blends two approaches to building theory, the axiomatic or logical-deductive and the data grounded or inductive. Clearly, the presuppositions underlying this research do not meet the rigorous requirements for axiomatic theory advanced by Blalock (1969) and Costner and Leik (1964) wherein relationships must be directly casual. The presuppositions come close, however, to satisfying the minimal prerequisites set forth by Bailey (1970), namely, that minimally acceptable axioms be expressed as associations.

Once associations or relationships are suspected, carefully devised research may be undertaken to clarify and specify the nature of those relationships. The exploratory study by Norton and Miller suggested three relationships. This study serves to replicate and confirm them.

Although the theory of communicator style is most preliminary, it is grounded in empirical data. The merit of grounding theory in empirical research lies in the ability of the theory to fit and work, i.e., predict and explain (Glasser & Straus, 1967). The limitation of grounded theory is that it calls for extensive and systematic research. One or even a few experiments simply cannot produce a fully developed theory. Based on this study and that by Norton and Miller (1975), communicator style theory presently consists of the two data based assumptions specified above and three empirically supported relationships identified by the research hypotheses.

One of the most immediate theory related needs is for research that will flesh-out relationships between the several communicator style classifications and perceptual accuracy. This study examined only three of nine possible combinations. Research is needed to discern whether or nor low and middle and high and middle pretest scorers perceive differences in the ways they communicate when in one another's presence. Based on this study, the expectation is that high and middle pretest scorers will report differences while low pretest scorers will not. There may be, however, no statistically or practically important difference between the perceptions of those whose communicator styles are reasonably similar. Indeed, the data for the middle versus middle pairings in this study suggest no appreciable difference. Correspondingly, it would be interesting to know how those with low and high pretest scores perceive themselves and another when the other possesses a substantially, but not maximally dissimilar style of communication. If effective social interactants are those who are aware of how they communicate and how they are perceived by others (Feffer & Suchotliff, 1966), then low scorers could be effective with some people, but just who is not yet clear.

Once these relationships have been established, communicator style theory will be sufficiently structured to permit systematic study of other communication concerns. Research will be necessary in two areas before a substantive theory can be advanced. One focus will involve studies of communicator style and other such components of the communication process as topic or commitment to a particular viewpoint and situation. A second focus will examine communicator style and personality.

In real life, topics or issues tend to draw people together. Likewise, the initiation of communication may derive from situational proximity. Most often, of course, both topic and situation serve to facilitate communication. Future research ought to investigate how a person's communicator style (and the implicit ability to perceive another's communicator style) relates to perception and understanding of another's position on salient topics or issues. For example, levels of communicator style could be crossed with attitudinal positions on some salient topic. Following social interaction, the subjects could be measured for their ability to perceive and understand one another's position(s) and their ability to influence the outcome of the exchange.

If the perceptual deficiency phenomenon reported in this study is to be firmly established, it will be necessary to demonstrate not only that those with low CSM scores fail to perceive stylistic communication dynamics, but further, that they fail to grasp fully the substance of another's argument. If this should be the case, communicator style will have utility as a theory capable of predicting and explaining communication outcomes and as a diagnostic tool for generating instructional and therapeutic activities. As communication is a learned behavior, instructional programs and a variety of therapeutic settings could utilize communicator style training as a vehicle for improving communication competencies and human

relationships.

A second research focus ought to explore the relationship between communicator style and personality. In several respects the thrust of this effort will parallel Bales' (1970) study of personality and interpersonal behavior. Bales indicates that different personality types exhibit different patterns of communication and perceptual abilities. The Communicator Style Measure in particular ought to prove valuable in refining the notions and insights Bales has advanced. Ultimately, a communicator style based personality taxonomy might result.

Lastly, as the results of any experimental study are only as "good" as the measuring instrument(s), continued refinement of the Communicator Style Measure is vitally important. In this study only the dominance dimension of the CSM was employed, although there is evidence to suggest that communicator style is a multidimensional construct. Future research must continue to develop the best possible measure if the full import of communicator style is to be realized.

NOTES

[1]The other two dimensions are syntactics and semantics. The former is concerned with problems relating to the transmission of information; that is, codes, channels, capacities, and noise. The latter represents a concern with language meaning, or, more specifically, symbol usage, definitions, and culturally accepted conventions.

[2]Eleven other dimensions emerged, but they are considerably weaker variable collections. The dimensions were descriptively labeled: inhibited, non-verbal, impression leaving, frequent talker, contentious, passive, resists persuasion, hesitant, dramatic, spurty contributor, and leader stroker.

[3]The other factors were considerably less impressive, but do suggest that communicator style may hold potential as a multidimensional construct. The factors were labeled: dramatic/animated, relaxed, open, attentive, impression leaving, and good communicator.

[4]The actual dependent variable consisted of thirty-three items. All but five items relate to the other dimensions of communicator style identified by factor analysis. Data on these dimensions was gathered for exploratory purposes. Overall, the implication is that the measures of the communicator style dimensions other than dominance are in need of extensive development and refinement.

[5]The actual CSM employed by the raters consisted of nineteen items, four of which relate to the dominance dimension. Items two and four were combined. The other fifteen items attempt to measure the factor analysis identified dimensions of communicator style.

[6]Throughout this experiment the term "research" hypothesis has been used rather than the statistical terms "null" and "alternative" hypotheses. The latter terminology was avoided for the sake of clarity. If phrased in null form, the hypotheses would state that no relationship other than chance expectation exists between pretest and post-test scores for the dyadic pairings. If viewed as statistical hypotheses in light of the data, the actual decisions would be: (A) reject the null and therefore retain the alternative, (b) retain the null, and (C) retain the null. The impressive finding in this research is that null hypothesis C is retained.

[7]The coefficient of reliability was computed for the entire nineteen item measure. The coefficient does not, however, take into account the extent of agreement among the raters that may have resulted from chance along.

[8]Based on the strength of the inter-rater reliability coefficient, the raters' evaluations of the subjects were collapsed. This procedure could be challenged because the raters, unlike the time element, are actually independent of one another. It is possible that the raters were not as reliable as the collapsing procedure and the analysis presumes. Consequently, in order to test for a potential rater effect, the data was re-analyzed. This time, however, the raters were treated as an additional ANOVA index. The effect for raters was not significant ($F_{(1,64)} = 1.11$, p .65).

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